

Examining How Communication Messages Impact White People's Attitudes about Laws

Banning DEI in Colleges and Universities

by

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(Under the Direction of Dr. Allison L. Skinner)

ABSTRACT

There has been an increase in political policies banning diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in colleges and universities in the United States. In the current research, I focused on examining how two different types of communication strategies influence White people's attitudes toward political policies. The first communication strategy involved providing information about historical and current systemic racial inequalities (SRI). The second communication strategy involved providing information about historical and current systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI +RC). In Study 1, qualitative research methods were utilized to identify how White people respond to articles that describe systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC; RQ1). The findings suggest that White people respond differently to articles with SRI+RC messages. In Study 2, I experimentally examined how exposure to SRI messages and SRI+RC messages influence people's attitudes about laws banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities could influence White people's support for the laws (RQ2) and awareness of White privilege (RQ3). White people who read a message that describes systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) would have higher support for policies that ban DEI initiatives (H1) and lower awareness of White privilege (H4) compared to people who read a message that describes systemic racial inequalities (SRI). These hypotheses were not supported. White people with higher political conservatism would be associated with more support for policies that ban DEI initiatives (H2) and lower awareness of white privilege (H5). These hypotheses were supported such that higher political conservatism was associated with higher support for policies banning DEI initiatives and lower awareness of white privilege. Finally, I hypothesized that there would be an interaction between political orientation and condition, such that the difference in support for banning DEI initiatives (H3) and awareness of white privilege (H6) between Conservatives and Liberals would be larger in the SRI+RC condition compared to the SRI condition. These hypotheses were not supported. The implications of this work, limitations, and suggestions for future directions are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Marley Hypothesis; racial colorblindness; Awareness of White privilege

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and the rise in the Black Lives Matter movement, there was an increase in conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) taking place in the United States. DEI was a major topic being discussed across domains from large corporations to educational institutions (Balkrishnan, 2023; Jan et al., 2021). People were discussing both racism and systemic racial inequalities and there was expanded news coverage about racial inequalities in the United States (Japsen 2020; Systemic racism: science must listen, learn and change, 2020). *Racism* has been defined as individual people treating people of color unequally (Braveman et al., 2022). *Systemic racial inequalities* have been defined as social systems (e.g., legal, health care) having policies that cause people of color to be treated unequally (Braveman et al., 2022). Despite the mounting evidence and attention placed on systemic racial inequalities in the United States, an opposing narrative that used racial colorblindness to blatantly deny the existence of these systems continued (Bonilla-Silva, 2020).

For example, amid these conversations, former president Trump signed into action an executive order named “Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping” (White House, 2020). Despite the title, the executive order utilized racially colorblind language to deny the existence of racism, citing that racism is in the past and everyone is treated equally. The executive order banned diversity training for institutions funded by the government including colleges and universities reasoning that these DEI initiatives are harmful to Americans. Although President Biden later

dismantled the executive order, the sentiment opposing DEI initiatives remains. As of April 19th, 2024, 84 bills have been introduced (thirteen passed) across twenty-eight states that ban various DEI initiatives at colleges and universities (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2024). Under these laws, colleges and universities are required to close and defund DEI offices and staff, prohibit mandatory DEI training, exclude diversity statements from hiring and admissions, and forbid identity-based preferences for hiring and admissions (Lu et al., 2023; The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2024). The current research focuses on examining people's attitudes toward political policies banning DEI initiatives. More specifically, this research examined the attitudes of White people, because they have the most representation in positions of power in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023) and political offices (Schaeffer, 2023).

In the following pages, I will first review the literature that speaks to why White people may not be inclined to support DEI initiatives at colleges and universities. The communication strategies I am interested in are informed by two theoretical frameworks: racial colorblindness and the Marley Hypothesis. I will provide an overview of both of these theoretical frameworks. Following this, I will explain how learning about historical and current systemic racial inequalities may impact White people's awareness of White privilege. Then, I will review the persuasiveness of different communication strategies. Finally, I will give an overview of the current research. In the current research, I aim to examine how two communication strategies may influence White people's attitudes about political policies. The first communication strategy involves providing information about systemic racial inequalities whereas the second communication strategy involves providing information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

White People May Not Want to Support DEI Initiatives at Colleges and Universities

DEI Initiatives in colleges and universities are important in the United States because they help support students of color. For example, many students of color report experiencing racial biases in an educational setting (Lewis et al., 2021). Many DEI initiatives aim to address and improve experiences for students of color. Yet, many White people may not be motivated to support DEI initiatives in colleges and universities because they may not see these initiatives as things that will benefit them. Previous work suggests that many White people may feel threatened by the mention of diversity or diversity initiatives because they may feel as though they may lose privileges or fear anti-White bias (Dover et al., 2016; Kaiser 2013). White people who were exposed to a company that values diversity (compared to a company that did not mention diversity) had higher concerns about being treated fairly in that company (Dover et al., 2016). Interestingly, the materials used in the study to indicate pro-diversity did not explicitly mention race or gender. Even the concept of diversity on its own activated concerns for White people. In an experimental study, Kaiser (2013) found that White people who read an organization's diversity statement (compared to a mission statement) perceived the organization as being less fair towards White people compared to people of color. Therefore, there is reason to believe that many White people may find DEI initiatives at colleges and universities to be racially threatening. Previous work has also found that when White people felt racially threatened by learning that the demographic representation would shift in the United States so

that racial minorities would be a majority (compared to no information about racial demographics) they were more likely to endorse conservative political policies (Craig & Richeson, 2014). Conservative policies in the United States aim to maintain social systems that benefit White people and typically do not support diversity initiatives (Allen, 2022).

Overview of Racial Colorblindness

In the United States, during the Jim Crow era, it was common for people to blatantly display racial biases, however, racial biases are no longer considered to be socially acceptable (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). As it is considered socially unacceptable to display racial biases, how people discuss racial issues has shifted to a subtler form of racial bias—racial colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Neville, 2013). As a dominant ideology in the United States, *racial colorblindness*, refers to the idea that people's racial identity does not or should not impact their experiences (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). People are motivated to behave in ways that are considered socially desirable and are concerned about how they will be perceived by others (Reis & Gruzen, 1976). To combat being perceived as displaying racial bias many people avoid discussing race altogether. Indeed, White college students who had higher external motivations to respond without prejudice (EMS) were more likely to avoid mentioning race even when race was relevant to the conversation (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). EMS refers to people being driven to appear unbiased due to concern about how they are perceived by others and potential social consequences (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). White people who are concerned about appearing to be prejudiced may elect to avoid mentioning race altogether because they are worried that doing so could be misconstrued with them displaying racial biases. This shows how White people have a prominent level of discomfort discussing race and could elect to utilize racial colorblindness as a means to avoid discussing race or racial inequalities. Beyond feeling discomfort in discussing

racial inequalities, White people may be motivated to minimize focus on systems that advantage White people and could choose to utilize racial colorblindness as a tool to benefit White people.

Scholars have identified different forms of racial colorblindness (see Table 1), each of which enables the preservation of interpersonal racial biases and systemic racial inequalities through various methods. Some forms of racial colorblindness involve directly denying the existence of racism and systemic racial inequalities. Refusing to acknowledge racism and systemic racial inequalities is problematic because it minimizes the experiences of racism that people of color encounter in the United States. However, on a broader scale, refusing to acknowledge systemic racial inequalities enables the preservation of these systemic racial inequalities. In the United States, White people may be particularly motivated to maintain these systems of racial inequalities because White people benefit the most from these systems.

Other forms of racial colorblindness focus on promoting egalitarian ideals and focusing attention away from racial inequalities. These forms of racial colorblindness that focus on promoting egalitarian ideals may be more pervasive in maintaining systems of racial inequality than forms of racial colorblindness that directly deny the existence of racism or systemic racial inequalities (Patel, 2022). This is because, at a surface level, racially colorblind messages that focus on promoting egalitarian ideals (e.g., “everyone should be treated equally”) are positive. However, these messages also fail to acknowledge the existence of racism or systemic racial inequalities.

Instead of racial colorblindness, there has been some debate in the literature about what alternative communication strategies should be utilized. Multiculturalism, celebrating group differences and positive aspects of diversity, has often been proposed as a better alternative to racial colorblindness (Plaut et al., 2008; Birnbaum et al., 2021). In an experimental study,

Richeson and Nussbaum (2004) found that White college students showed more racially biased attitudes when they were asked to read messages about diversity that contained racially colorblind statements compared to multicultural statements. Exposure to multiculturalism has also been shown to influence people's behaviors and associated better outcomes compared to racial colorblindness (Holoien & Shelton, 2012; Plaut et al., 2008). Collectively, previous research indicates that multiculturalism should be considered a better communication strategy compared to racial colorblindness. However, I propose that in the United States, multiculturalism should not be considered an ideal communication strategy.

A key drawback of both racial colorblindness and multiculturalism is that both communication strategies do not advocate for acknowledging current systemic racial inequalities. Racial colorblindness tends to place racism in the past, communicating that everyone is the same and are treated equally now (Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Neville, 2013). Although a racially colorblind communication strategy may briefly recognize historical racism, it is not done so in detail or connect how historical racial inequalities continue to impact people in the present. A multicultural communication strategy emphasizes celebrating group differences but when it comes to discussing anti-racist political policies this strategy may be ineffective because it does not fully convey the need for these anti-racist political policies. As both racial colorblindness and multiculturalism have drawbacks, I propose a good alternative communication strategy that involves directly discussing racial inequalities by also including information about historical and current systemic racial inequalities.

Marley Hypothesis

There has been a concerted effort to present a positive perception of White people in American history (Lavelle, 2017). More specifically, the historical injustices enacted by White

people are minimized, placing White people in a positive light and downplaying the inequalities experienced by people from racial minority groups. For example, a study examining how Black History Month was presented in U.S. schools found that schools with a predominantly White student body had posters that focused on celebrating diversity, in contrast, schools that were predominantly made up of students of color had posters that discussed details about historical injustices (Salter & Adams, 2016). Although celebrating civil rights heroes such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks is important, choosing to only focus on celebrating civil rights heroes without acknowledging the injustices faced by people of color is harmful because it minimizes the history of people of color and reframes history in a positive light. Many White people opposed the Civil Rights Movement, and some White people even claimed to be victims (Lavelle, 2017). Indeed, in a qualitative study, White people who experienced segregation during the 1960s were asked about their experience during the Civil Rights Movement. White people often adopted a White victimhood narrative, where they minimized racial inequalities and instead focused on how White people struggled during this time (Lavelle, 2017). White people benefited largely from historical systemic racial inequalities and continue to do so today (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014).

Nelson and colleagues (2012) introduced the Marley Hypothesis which suggests that differences in knowledge about historical racism and the need to maintain a positive racial identity may contribute to racial differences in perception of racism. The *Marley Hypothesis* states that educating people about historical and current systemic racial inequalities can influence people's attitudes to be more aware of racial inequalities. Bonam and colleagues (2019) found that White people who learned about historical discrimination were more likely to acknowledge current systemic racial inequalities. Similar findings were replicated with a representative sample

of United States residents in an experimental study where people who were given information about historical systemic racial inequalities (compared to no information) were more likely to acknowledge racial inequality (Fang & White, 2024). Beyond shifting general attitudes about racial inequalities, gaining an understanding of historical systemic inequalities also influences White people's support for political policies. When White people learned about historical injustices towards Black people in healthcare, they were more likely to support anti-racist health care policies (Martin & Johnson, 2023).

Strategic and Instinctive Use of Racial Colorblindness

In politics, racially colorblind messages are often utilized strategically as a tool to oppose anti-racist political policies. Brooks and colleagues (2017) examined political documents and media coverage of conservative political organizations and found that conservative organizations utilized racially colorblind messages to oppose affirmative action (i.e., political policies in the United States created to increase representation of historically minoritized people in the workplace and education by taking into that take into consideration people's ethnic and racial identity when making decisions on hiring or admissions). Additionally, media outlets were more likely to support political documents created by conservative organizations when the organizations presented racially colorblind messages (compared to blatantly racist messages) in the documents (Brooks et al., 2017). Using racially colorblind messages enables politically conservative organizations and politicians to support racist political policies without sounding racist. The aim of affirmative action is to reduce racial inequalities in higher education. The opposition towards affirmative action can be perceived similarly to the opposition towards DEI initiatives in colleges and universities as both have similar goals of reducing racial inequalities.

Therefore, it is possible that racially colorblind messages are also used to gain support banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities.

In another example, in 2016, to protest and bring attention to racial inequalities in the United States, quarterback Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the national anthem (Idzik, 2023). In the United States, prior to the start of sporting games it is typical for the national anthem to be played. During the national anthem it is expected that everyone stand up to show respect therefore Kaepernick taking a knee during the national anthem gained attention and spurred conversations about racism across the nation. However, as outlined by Idzik (2023), racial colorblindness was utilized strategically to refocus the conversation away from discussing racial injustices. This sentiment can be demonstrated by a statement made by an owner of a football team who said, “Our players have the freedom to express themselves....our sole message is to provide and promote an environment that is focused on love and equality” (Idzik, p. 96). Missing from these racially colorblind statements is any acknowledgment of the ongoing racism and systemic racial inequalities present in the United States.

As racial colorblindness is a dominant ideology in the United States (Bonilla-Silvia, 2020) and it is possible that some people may utilize racially colorblind messages instinctively, without conscious intention. Jones and colleagues (2023) conducted a qualitative study examining middle school students’ and teachers’ responses to instances of racist bullying within their school. When asked about bullying in their schools both teachers and students organically responded by using racially colorblind messages. For example, one student said “The worst I’ve heard is a Black person calling a Black person a burnt chicken nugget. There’s nothing really racist going around in school. I think we’re equal,” (Jones et al., 2023, p. 3866). In using racially colorblind messages the teachers and students were able to minimize how race played a role in

bullying. In another study, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) faculty were asked to read scenarios describing instances of racism in a classroom setting (e.g., “Her group expects Sam to answer questions about the Henrietta Lacks (a Black woman) case, because she is Black.” King et al., 2023, p.5) and asked to identify what they felt was problematic with the scenario. A majority of STEM faculty responded by using racial colorblind messages (King et al., 2023). In these instances people’s use of racially colorblind messages could be instinctive due to the prevalence of racially colorblind messaging in the United States. However, using racial colorblindness has negative consequences as it minimizes focus on racial inequalities.

This phenomenon, of acknowledging racial inequalities but then subsequently minimizing racial inequalities through racial colorblindness, is common among White people (Mueller, 2017; Dancy & Hodari, 2023). Instinctive use of racial colorblindness also extends to people who perceive themselves as being conscious and informed about racial biases. White volunteers who described themselves as being aware of racism and systemic inequalities were asked about their everyday interactions. The volunteers did not discuss race, which suggests that they are unaware of their racial privilege (Schneider, 2022). Even when White people are given extensive background and information about systemic racial inequality, they may still turn to respond with a racially colorblind communication strategy to process the information. In a clever design, Mueller (2017) conducted a qualitative analysis of papers written by White undergraduate college students. Students in this class were taught about historical systemic racism and how these systems continue to impact people today. Students were asked to write a paper where they were instructed to collect data about their family’s intergenerational wealth and then relate this information to the course material on systemic racism. A qualitative analysis of White students’ papers found that even when students mentioned evidence of White privilege in

their family, they often responded with racially colorblind messages to engage in racial ignorance. Even when the use of racially colorblind messages is not planned and could be instinctive it results in White people being able to minimize focus on racial inequalities and maintain a positive perception of themselves and their own racial identity. All of this suggests that it may be fairly common for people to share messages that contain information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages. In turn, many people are exposed to messages that contain information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages.

White Privilege Awareness

Messages that only contain information about systemic racial inequalities have been shown to make White people in the United States more aware of their privilege. Case and Rios (2017) found that when undergraduate college students watched a video about White privilege (compared to no video) they showed higher awareness of White privilege. Similarly, college students who took a diversity class showed a higher awareness of White privilege compared to college students who did not take a diversity class (Cole, 2011). These studies showcase that perhaps learning about white privilege or learning more about racial inequalities can cause people to reflect and be more aware of white privilege. A study with White college students who engaged in a 4-week cultural competency training program where they learned about racism showed higher awareness of White privilege after the end of the program (Robey & Dickter, 2022). Previous work has found that awareness of White privilege could be related to support for anti-racist political policies. Dobbs & Nicholson (2022) found that lower white privilege awareness was associated with lower support for anti-racist political policies (e.g., affirmative action) and lower support for political activism (e.g., NFL players protesting racism).

The Persuasiveness of One-sided and Two-sided Messages

When considering the impact of different communication strategies to inform people about political policies it is important to consider factors that may influence the persuasiveness of the message. Previous work shows that there may be a difference in how persuasive a message seems when the message is one-sided or two-sided. One-sided messages contain content that only provides arguments or reasons that support an opinion (O'keefe, 1999). Two-sided messages contain content that includes opposing viewpoints that both support and oppose an opinion (O'keefe, 1999). Previous work has found that people perceive the source of the message as more trustworthy when they are provided with two-sided messages compared to one-sided messages (Hendriks et al., 2023). Two-sided messages can further be classified as non-refutational or refutational. Non-refutational two-sided messages include content that mentions opposing arguments but does not attempt to directly deny the opposing arguments (O'keefe, 1999). Refutational two-sided messages include content that mentions opposing arguments and directly denies these opposing arguments (O'keefe, 1999). A meta-analysis found that for messages related to sociopolitical content (e.g., drunk driving), refutational two-sided messages were more persuasive compared to non-refutational two-sided messages and one-sided messages (O'keefe, 1999). However, Metzger and colleagues (2020) found that one-sided messages that align with someone's previous attitudes can be perceived as being more persuasive because one-sided messages only contain attitude-consistent information.

The persuasiveness of a message can also be impacted by a person's previous behaviors and attitudes. Cornelis and colleagues (2014) experimentally examined if U.S. teenagers' intentions to drink alcohol would be influenced by reading one-sided, two-sided non-refutational, or two-sided refutational messages about the dangers of drinking alcohol. For teenagers with

higher involvement with binge drinking, two-sided refutational and two-sided non-refutational messages led to lower intentions to drink alcohol compared to a one-sided message. For teenagers with lower involvement with binge drinking, this type of message did not influence their intentions to drink alcohol. In another study, Kim (2020) examined how two-sided refutational messages or one-sided messages influenced people's opinions about a political candidate. For participants who had similar political ideologies as the political candidate (e.g., the participant identified as being a Democrat and the political candidate was a Democrat) reading the two-sided refutational message led to less favorable attitudes towards the political candidate compared to one-sided messages. Although only moderately significant, for participants who had different political ideologies from the political candidate (e.g., the participant identified as a Democrat, and the political candidate was a Republican) one-sided message led to less favorable attitudes towards the political candidate compared to a two-sided refutational message. This indicates that both people's previous attitudes and the type of message (one-sided or two-sided) can influence how effective a message is at impacting people's attitudes.

CHAPTER 3

CURRENT RESEARCH

In the current research, I focused on examining how two different types of communication strategies influence people's attitudes toward political policies. The first communication strategy involved providing information about historical and current systemic racial inequalities (SRI). This communication strategy is based on the Marley Hypothesis which suggests that learning about historical systemic inequalities can influence people's perceptions of current racial inequalities. Previous work has provided evidence that learning about historical and current racial inequalities can increase awareness of racial inequalities (Fang & White, 2024). The second communication strategy involved providing information about historical and current systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI +RC). This communication strategy (SRI+RC) included racially colorblind messages that directly deny the existence of systemic racial inequalities and racially colorblind messages that promote egalitarian ideals. Previous work has found that White people often pair information about historical and current systemic racial inequalities with both types of racially colorblind messages (Mueller 2017; King et al., 2023). This shows that it is likely that people are being exposed to information about systemic racial inequalities and racial colorblindness together. While exposure to information about systemic racial inequalities has led to an increase in awareness of racial inequalities (Fang & White, 2024) exposure to racially colorblind messages has led to lower awareness of racial inequalities (Apfelbaum et al., 2010). However, there has not been any

research examining how messages that provide both pieces of information, about systemic racial inequalities and racial colorblindness together influence people's attitudes.

The current research utilized a mixed methods design. In Study 1, qualitative research methods were utilized to identify how White people respond to messages that describe systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC; RQ1). Previous work shows that when people pair information about systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages they also communicate their opinions about the topic (Mueller, 2017). In the United States, it is likely that messages about political policies that people encounter that pair information about systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages could take a stance on the political policy. Therefore, to replicate the type of information people may encounter the articles used for Study 1, are refutational two-sided messages.

In Study 2, I experimentally examined how exposure to SRI messages and SRI+RC messages influences people's attitudes. Previous work indicates that two-sided refutational messages are higher in persuasiveness compared to one-sided messages (O'keefe, 1999). In order to make sure that the article with SRI + RC messages is not inherently more persuasive than the article with SRI messages, both articles did not explicitly state support or opposition for banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities. In Study 2, I examined how these different communication strategies about laws banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities could influence White people's support for the laws (RQ2) and awareness of White privilege (RQ3).

Martin and Johnson (2023) found that exposure to information about systemic racial inequalities increases White people's support for anti-racist political policies. However, for White college students, higher endorsement of racial colorblindness was associated with lower support for anti-racist political policies (Mazzocco et al., 2011). Therefore, White people will

respond differently to messages that describe systemic racial inequalities (SRI) versus messages that describe systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC). I hypothesize that White people who listen to a message that describes systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) will have higher support for policies that ban DEI initiatives compared to people who listen to a message that describes systemic racial inequalities (SRI; H1). Previous work has shown that for White people, learning about racial inequalities is associated with higher awareness of White privilege (Robey & Dickter, 2022). I hypothesize that White people who read a message that describes systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) will have lower awareness of White privilege compared to people who read a message that describes systemic racial inequalities (SRI; H4).

Previous work has shown that more conservative political policies do not typically support DEI initiatives (Allen, 2022). Therefore, I hypothesize that for White people, higher political conservatism will be associated with more support for policies that ban DEI initiatives (H2). Additionally, for White people, higher political conservatism will be associated with lower awareness of white privilege (H5).

Previous work suggests that people's prior attitudes about a topic influences how two-sided messages impact their opinion on that topic (Cornelis et al., 2014; Kim 2022). Thus, I hypothesize that there will be an interaction between political orientation and condition, such that the difference in support for banning DEI initiatives between Conservatives and Liberals will be larger in the SRI+RC condition compared to the SRI condition (H3). I also hypothesize that there will be an interaction between political orientation and condition, such that the difference in awareness of white privilege between people who are more conservative and more liberal will be larger in the SRI+RC condition compared to the SRI condition (H6). For both people who are

more conservative and more liberal who read SRI messages may have lower support for banning DEI initiatives and higher awareness of white privilege. However when reading the SRI+RC messages people who are more conservative or more liberal may place more value on parts of the message that align with their prior beliefs. For people who are more conservative, who read SRI+RC messages they may focus more on the racially colorblind messages and ignore the information about systemic racial inequalities and have higher support for banning DEI initiatives and lower awareness of white privilege. However, for people who are more liberal who read SRI+RC messages, they may have a negative reaction to the racially colorblind messages and focus more on the information about systemic racial inequalities and have lower support for banning DEI initiatives and higher awareness of white privilege.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY 1 METHODS

Study 1 Overview

In Study 1, I used qualitative methods to gain an understanding of how White people in the United States respond and react to communication strategies that include information about systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages (SRI + RC). As this was the first study to my knowledge examining this phenomenon using qualitative methods is beneficial because this is the first study to my knowledge that examined White people's responses to this communication strategy. Using open-ended questions enabled me to gain insights into what White people think when they read these types of messages (SRI+ RC) and identify any themes that emerge.

Participants

White people over the age of 18 years old were recruited to participate in an online study. From April 4th, 2024 to April 25th, 2024 undergraduate college students were recruited from the University of Georgia, a large public university in the Southeastern United States. The final sample consisted of 32 White undergraduate college students. Further demographic information can be found in Table 3.

Procedure

Participants were told that researchers are interested in examining how AI software creates essays. The following message was displayed to participants “*The use of AI software (e.g., chat gpt3) has grown in popularity. We are interested in examining articles and essays*

written by AI software. We generated short articles about current events using AI software. You will be randomly asked to read two articles and give feedback on each of the articles. Please read each of the articles carefully.” The purpose of deception is to make people feel more comfortable being critical of the articles that they read. Participants read the article about the Indian Child Welfare Act followed by the article about political policies banning DEI at colleges and universities. Participants were first asked to fill out the Familiarity with the Indian Child Welfare Act (Familiarity with Laws Banning DEI in Colleges and Universities), then read the article, followed by open-ended questions. This process was repeated for the second article.

Materials

Articles (see Appendix A and Appendix B)

Participants were asked to review two short 300–360 word articles. Each of the articles utilized messages that describe systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages. The first article was based on a political policy, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA; see Appendix B). This topic, ICWA, was selected because it may be less well known among White undergraduate students and would provide another avenue for understanding how White people respond to messages that describe systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages. The second article was based on political policies banning DEI at colleges and universities (see Appendix A). This topic was selected because it is the topic of interest for the current research. The racially colorblind messages that were used in both articles are common in the racial colorblindness literature and some statements were drawn directly from previous work on racial colorblindness (King et al., 2023; Mueller 2017). Content from the messages was drawn from articles about systemic inequalities in higher education (Chen 2021; *A History of Exclusion for*

Students of Color, 2021). Information from these articles was provided to ChatGPT and ChatGPT was utilized in drafting the articles.

Familiarity with the Indian Child Welfare Act (see Appendix C)

Participants were asked, “How familiar are you with this topic, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)?” on a scale from 1 (not at all familiar) to 5 (extremely familiar). Higher scores indicate greater familiarity with the topic.

Familiarity with Laws Banning DEI in Colleges and Universities (see Appendix D)

Participants were asked, “How familiar are you with this topic, laws Banning DEI in Colleges and Universities?” on a scale from 1 (not at all familiar) to 5 (extremely familiar). Higher scores indicated greater familiarity with the topic.

Open Ended Questions (see Appendix E)

Participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions to gain an understanding of their attitudes towards messages containing information about systemic racial inequalities and racially colorblind messages. There were 8 open-ended questions related to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and 8 open-ended questions related to policies banning DEI initiatives at Colleges and Universities. The open-ended questions were created to elicit information about agreement and disagreement about the messages as well as overall attitudes about the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and laws banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities. Finally, there was one open-ended question about how participants felt about both articles.

CHAPTER 5

STUDY 1 RESULTS

To analyze the data a deductive thematic data analysis approach was utilized. Deductive data analysis involves understanding the data and then making sense of patterns and themes that emerge from the data (Azungah 2018). A deductive data analysis approach is valuable for the current study because the purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of how White people respond to messages that contain information about systemic racism with colorblind messages (SRI +RC) and uncover what occurs organically without making prior assumptions. Thematic analysis involves identifying patterns that emerge in the data. Braun & Clark (2006) identify six steps that can be utilized when conducting thematic analysis: “1. Familiarize yourself with your data, 2. Generating initial codes, 3. Searching for themes, 4., Reviewing themes, 5. Defining and naming themes, 6. Producing the report” (p. 87).

I followed the six steps suggested by Braun & Clark (2006) to conduct a thematic analysis (see Table 2). In order to familiarize myself with the data, I began by reading participants' responses to each open-ended question. After reading all of the participant responses once, I read participant responses for all of the open-ended questions again and took note of any patterns that stood out to me to generate initial codes (see Figure 1). Once I was able to identify initial codes, I then examined the codes to see how they were related, to identify themes. I initially identified four themes: 1) Uniform Agreement: Overlooking Inconsistencies in Messages, 2) Critical Evaluation: Recognizing Inconsistencies in Messages, 3) Indecisive: Seeking More Information, 4) Reactance to Racial Colorblindness (see Figure 2). Having

identified 4 themes, I evaluated how these themes were related to the data. In order to do this I went back to the data and read through all of the participants' responses to open-ended questions to see how the participant's responses were related to the 4 themes I identified. After this evaluation, I found that one of the themes I initially identified, Reactance to Racial Colorblindness, should not be a separate theme because it closely relates to another theme, Critical Evaluation: Recognizing Inconsistencies in Messages (see Figure 3). This led me to distinguish three themes: 1) Uniform Agreement: Overlooking Inconsistencies in Messages, 2) Critical Evaluation: Recognizing Inconsistencies in Messages, 3) Indecisive: Seeking More Information.

In the articles, participants were presented with information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages. The information about systemic racial inequalities often contradicted racially colorblind messages. For example, in the article about Laws banning DEI in colleges and universities, the information about systemic racial inequalities that was shown stated “...Recent studies show that the verbal part of the SAT favors certain cultural backgrounds over others...thereby disadvantaging those from different contexts, often students of color...”. On the other hand, the racially colorblind message that was shown stated “...all of these inequalities are more accurately defined as wealth inequalities. Granted, in the past, people of color were not allowed the same opportunities as White people however, this is not the case now. No one should be treated unequally because of their race....”. Both of these messages contradict each other however many participants indicated that they agreed with the entire article. However, people differed in terms of what pieces of information they chose to focus on.

Uniform Agreement: Overlooking Inconsistencies in Messages

Some participants acknowledged that historical systemic racial inequalities existed however they focused on racially colorblind messages to deny the existence of current systemic racial inequalities. For example, when discussing banning DEI in colleges and universities, one participant said:

“DEIs were introduced to give students of color better opportunities in college. DEIs were once necessary but are not anymore. Racism is barley prevalent on campuses anymore”- White Man, 19

He used the idea that racial inequalities no longer exist to support banning DEI in colleges and Universities saying

“...discontinue DEIs, because they only encourage unequal treatment of different races in current times.” - White, Man, 19

Participants had similar attitudes when discussing the Indian Child Welfare Act. For example, another participant said:

“I do not disagree with anything in the article. I believe the article raised awareness of this problem going on in America. I think that all children should be loved whether that is someone from their culture or not.”- White woman, 20

She focused on racially colorblind messages stating:

“I agree that all children should be loved and cared for regardless of their race or heritage. I think the act should be banned because the act makes it more or a discrimination towards natives rather than a helpful, loving action for children”. – White Woman, 20

Participants agreed with racially colorblind messages and used the racially colorblind messages as justification for why they should support banning DEI initiatives in colleges and the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Critical Evaluation: Recognizing Inconsistencies in Messages

Other participants opposed racially colorblind messages and specifically noted that the messages about systemic racial inequalities seemed contradictory to the racially colorblind messages. For example, when describing the article about banning DEI in colleges and universities one participant said:

“the article is entirely contradictory, and does not get its point across at all”- White Man, 20

Although there were racially colorblind messages throughout the article, interestingly most participants do not mention the inconsistencies until the last paragraph:

“The article spends two and a half paragraphs discussing racism in the education system, and the support that African American students have needed in the past. It concludes by disregarding all of these arguments, and dismissing racism as something that does not occur on college campuses which does not even serve as a valid argument against DEI.” - White Man, 20

“the article seemed to double back on itself, seeming to advocate for DEI until the last paragraph”- White Man, 20

A similar sentiment was shared about the article about the Indian Child Welfare Act with one participant saying :

“I would take out the latter half of the last paragraph because it seems contradictory” White Man, 21

Many people also indicated that the racially colorblind messages are untrue. For example, when discussing the Indian Child Welfare Act, one participant said:

“...it seemed that it [the article] was trying to say that race and ethnicity should not matter. This was problematic because the whole reason for this article was racial inequality regarding Children removal policies.” - White Man, 21

However, it is important to note that more participants stated that the racially colorblind messages were not true in the article about banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities. For example, some participants said:

“I disagree with the statement that “Overall racism does not happen on college campuses”. I do think that a college campus is probably the most accepting place someone of color could be as college kids tend to be open minded and free thinkers, but I think it’s irresponsible to make a claim that it doesn’t happen” - White Man, 20

“The article posits the idea that DEI is unnecessary because there is equal opportunity on college campuses today. This is blatantly false.” Then goes on to say that *“DEI should not be banned. The US has a violent history of discrimination, and DEI aims to provide opportunity to historically disadvantaged groups.”* - White, Man, 22

Participants who disagreed with racially colorblind messages also did not support banning DEI initiatives in colleges or the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Indecisive: Seeking More Information

Many participants wanted to know more information about the Indian Child Welfare Act before they could form an opinion about whether these laws should be banned. For example, when discussing the Indian Child Welfare Act, one participant said

“I don’t know whether I agree or disagree or not because I just learned about this act and don’t have a complete understanding of it.” - White Man, 22

Indeed this uncertainty seemed to lead many people to not take a stance on whether or not these political policies should be banned. When it came to discussing the Indian Child Welfare Act, one person clarified that:

“There was not enough information for me to form an opinion, but if the children are in a place of danger, then no it should not be banned. However, if they are simply being removed from their homes and placed somewhere else, that is wrong and yes it should be banned.” – White Woman, 20

When it came to political policies banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities it seemed as though participants had more of an understanding of the laws, however they did not take a stance on whether or not the policies should be banned it was because of how they think that the DEI initiatives should be implemented. For example, some participants stated:

“I think DEI programs are important, especially once the student is on campus, but it’s hard to say how they should be implemented in admissions process.” - White Woman, 20

Another participant said:

“I think DEI is important but I don’t think it’s fair that a white person could potentially not get into a school because a person of color is accepted to meet a certain quota, even if they have a “stronger” resume” - White Man, 20

As indicated in his response there seemed to be some concern that DEI initiatives are discriminatory towards White people. Although he never explicitly states whether or not DEI initiatives should be banned he said:

“I agree that people of color have less opportunities prior to college than white people which is why I believe their should be a higher emphasis on k-12 facilities receiving assistance with learning programs, better teachers, and other things that could set them up to succeed at a higher rate.”. – White Man, 20

Although participants were able to acknowledge that there are some racial disparities when it came to indicating their opinion about supporting banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities and the Indian Child Welfare Act participants who did not take a stance indicated that they understood that there is a need for these policies. However, it seemed as though participants were unsure about how these policies were being implemented or had alternative solutions. For policies banning DEI initiatives there also appeared to be a fear of anti-white bias.

CHAPTER 6

STUDY 1 DISCUSSION

In study 1, the results suggest that there are two key patterns in how people responded to communication strategies that contain information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI + RC) about political policies. It appears some people responded positively to the messages related to systemic racial inequalities and negatively to racially colorblind statements. On the other hand, some people responded positively towards racially colorblind statements and seemed to ignore or dismiss information about systemic racial inequalities. Perhaps one reason White people responded differently to the same message is that they have different prior beliefs. Previous work has found that when it comes to information about political policies people in the United States tend to seek out and spend more time reading information that is consistent with their beliefs (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020).

In the current study, there were more participants who responded positively towards messages related to systemic racial inequalities and negatively towards racially colorblind statements (see Table 4). This pattern of response would align with not supporting banning both the Indian Child Welfare Act and DEI initiatives in colleges and universities. Indeed, in the current sample a majority of participants indicated that they would not support banning the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) or banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities (see Table 5).

Alongside focusing on information that is consistent with their prior attitudes, it is possible that some people also have a reactance towards information that is inconsistent with

their prior attitudes. For example, in Study 1, it was evident that some people had a negative reactance towards racially colorblind messages stating that racially colorblind messages are untrue. However, this negative reactance towards racially colorblind statements seemed to occur more often in response to the article about political policies banning DEI initiatives compared to the article about the Indian Child Welfare Act. Perhaps, the type of racially colorblind messages used led to this difference in reactance. Indeed, the article about political policies banning DEI initiatives had more descriptive racially colorblind messages (e.g., “However, these events are few and far between, overall racism does not happen on college campuses”; see Table 1) whereas the article about the Indian Child Welfare Act primarily had prescriptive racially colorblind messages (e.g., “However, ICWA is not needed because we should have equal opportunities for all children to be placed in loving and supportive homes, regardless of racial or ethnic background.”; see Table 1). Prior work has found that when people are exposed to descriptive racially colorblind messages, they are likely to have a reactance against the messages (Patel, 2022) however when people are exposed to prescriptive racially colorblind messages they are likely to support the messages.

When White people read articles with information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages they can have varied responses to this information. It seemed as though White people were focusing on different parts of the article with some people responding positively (or negatively) towards racially colorblind messages and agreed with (or disagree with) information about systemic racial inequalities. Perhaps, White people's prior political beliefs could be causing White people to be responding differently to the articles. In the study 2, I examine how people's previous political attitudes influence how they respond to communication strategies that contain information about systemic racial inequalities paired with

racially colorblind messages. In addition to this, as Study 1 was a qualitative study it was not possible to determine to what extent reading articles with information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages impacted people's attitudes about political policies. Therefore, in Study 2, I experimentally examine how exposure to an article with systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages or an article with only systemic racial inequalities impact people's attitudes towards political policy.

CHAPTER 7

STUDY 2 METHODS

In Study 2, I was interested in examining how the two communication strategies—systemic racial inequalities (SRI) and systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC)—impact White people’s attitudes towards political policies (RQ2) and awareness of White privilege (RQ 3). I hypothesized the following:

- H1: White people who read an article that describes systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) will have higher support for policies that ban DEI initiatives compared to people who read an article that describes systemic racial inequalities (SRI), without providing any colorblind messages.
- H2: For White people, higher political conservatism will be associated with more support for policies that ban DEI initiatives.
- H3: There will be an interaction between political orientation and condition, such that the difference in support for banning DEI initiatives between Conservatives and Liberals will be larger in the SRI+RC condition compared to the SRI condition.
- H4: White people who read an article that describes systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) will have lower awareness of White privilege compared to people who read an article that describes systemic racial inequalities (SRI)
- H5: For White people, higher political conservatism will be associated with lower awareness of white privilege.

- H6: There will be an interaction between political orientation and condition, such that the difference in awareness of white privilege between people who are more conservative and more liberal will be larger in the SRI+RC condition compared to the SRI condition.

Participants

A G*power analysis indicates that for a t-test to detect a small-medium effect ($d = .33$), a sample size of 292 would provide 80% power. A total of 420 White people from the United States were recruited to participate in an online study via Connect Cloud Research in May 2024. Participants were paid \$2.50 and the sample was limited to people who identified as White, living in the United States and over the age of 18. Participants were asked to complete 4 items to screen for bots. Participants who failed to correctly respond to two or more of the screening questions were excluded from the analysis. Participants were asked to complete one attention check question to ensure that participants were paying attention to the manipulation. Participants who failed to correctly answer the attention check question were excluded from the final sample. A total of 3 participants were excluded from the analysis. The final sample consisted of 417 White participants and the gender of participants was 210 Men (50.36%), 199 Women (47.72%), 6 non-binary (1.44%), 1 transgender (.24%) and 1 White/Guyanese Indian (.24%). The average age for participants was 41.72 ($SD=13.01$). For education, 2 participants stated that they had completed some high school (0.48), 62 participants had a high school diploma (14.87), 70 participants had some college (16.79), 51 participants had an associate's degree (12.23), 159 participants had a Bachelor's degree (38.13), and 73 participants had a Master's Degree (17.51). The median income was \$60,000 - \$69,999 ($M= 70,000 - \$79,999$) and for employment, 120 participants were unemployed (28.78%) and 297 were employed (71.22%).

Procedure

Participants were told “The use of AI has grown in popularity. We are interested in examining how AI could be used to create content. We provided an AI platform with several prompts about current events and requested that AI create an article related to the topic. You will randomly be assigned to read an article generated by AI. Then you will be asked to give your opinion on the AI-generated article and your opinion on the current event.” Following this, participants were randomly assigned to read an article for one of two conditions: systemic racial inequalities in education with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC; see Appendix ADD) and systemic racial inequalities in education (SRI; see Appendix ADD). Finally, participants were asked to complete measures to assess their agreement with the article, support for banning DEI initiatives, awareness of White privilege, political ideology, and a demographic questionnaire.

Materials

Agreement with Article (see Appendix I)

Participants were instructed “please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements” on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale had 3 items (i.e., “I agree with everything in the article”; “The article had good points” ; “I would say similar things about this topic”). To calculate a composite score all 3 items were averaged such that a higher score indicates higher agreement with the article.

Awareness of White Privilege (see Appendix J)

The White Privilege Awareness Scale (Swim & Miller, 1999) assesses the extent to which White people are aware of their privilege. Participants were instructed to “Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements” on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale has 5 items (e.g., “White people have certain

advantages that minorities do not have in this society”). To calculate a composite score, all 5 items were averaged such that higher scores indicated higher awareness of White privilege.

Support for Policies Banning DEI Initiatives. (see Appendix K)

The support for policies banning DEI initiatives scale assesses participants’ opinions on banning DEI initiatives at colleges and universities. Participants were instructed to “Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements” on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The support for policies banning DEI initiatives has 5 items (e.g., “Mandatory DEI training should not be required at colleges or universities”). To calculate a composite score, all 5 items were averaged such that higher scores indicate more support for laws banning DEI initiatives.

Political ideology. (see Appendix L)

To assess participant’s political ideology, participants were asked to respond to two items from 1 (strongly liberal) to 7 (strongly conservative). The items are “Please indicate your political ideology on social issues (e.g., abortion, gay rights). I am _____ on social issues. ” and “Please indicate your political ideology on economic issues (e.g., taxes, government spending). I am _____ on economic issues.” To calculate a composite score both items were averaged such that higher scores indicate higher political conservatism.

Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix M)

Demographic questions were asked to assess participants’ age, gender, racial/ethnic identity, income, education level, immigrant status, and employment status.

CHAPTER 8

STUDY 2 RESULTS

An independent samples t-test was used to examine the effect of experimental conditions on support for banning DEI initiatives. Hypothesis 1 was not supported, results indicated that there was no significant effect of condition. White people's support for banning DEI initiatives did not differ for people in the SRI condition ($M=2.95$, $SD=1.19$) and the SRI+RC condition ($M=3.10$, $SD=1.30$), $t(415)=-1.21$, $p=.228$ (see Figure 4).

Next, I conducted a Pearson's correlation to examine how political ideology was related to support for banning DEI initiatives. Hypothesis 2 was supported, the results suggest that more political conservatism was associated with more support for banning DEI initiatives, $r(416) = .648$, $p<.001$.

Finally, a mixed model was conducted with participants' (mean centered) political ideology as an interacting covariate to examine the effects of experimental condition and participants' political ideology on support for banning DEI initiatives. Hypothesis 3 was not supported, there was not a statistically significant interaction between condition and participants' political attitudes, $F(1,413) = 2.14$, $p = .144$, (see Figure 5). There was a statistically significant main effect of political ideology, $F(1, 413) = 304.79$, $p<.0001$. Participants that were more politically conservative (+1SD) had higher support for laws banning DEI initiatives ($M=3.84$, $SE = 0.07$) than participants that were more politically liberal ($M = 2.21$, $SE = 0.07$). There was a marginally significant main effect of condition, $F(1, 413) = 2.94$, $p=0.087$. Participants in the

SRI+RC condition reported higher support for laws banning DEI initiatives ($M = 2.95$, $SE = 0.07$) than participants in the SRI condition ($M = 3.11$, $SE = 0.06$).

Awareness of White Privilege

An independent samples t-test was used to examine the effect of experimental conditions on awareness of White privilege. Hypothesis 4 was not supported, results indicated that there was no statistically significant effect of condition. White people's awareness of White privilege did not differ for people in the SRI condition ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.22$) and SRI+RC condition ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.24$), $t(415) = 0.16$, $p = .761$ (see Figure 6).

Next, I conducted a Pearson's correlation to examine how political ideology was related to awareness of White Privilege. Hypothesis 5 was supported, the results suggest that more political conservatism was associated with less awareness of White Privilege, $r(416) = -0.65$, $p < .0001$.

Finally, a mixed model was conducted with participants' (mean centered) political ideology as an interacting covariate to examine the effects of experimental condition and participants' political ideology on awareness of White Privilege. Hypothesis 6 was not supported, there was not a statistically significant interaction between condition and participants' political attitudes, $F(1, 413) = 0.66$, $p = .417$, (see Figure 7). There was a statistically significant main effect of political ideology, $F(1, 413) = 307.36$, $p < .0001$. Participants that were more politically conservative (+1SD) had lower awareness of White Privilege ($M = 2.57$, $SE = 0.06$) than participants that were more politically liberal (-1SD; $M = 4.18$, $SE = 0.07$). There was not a statistically significant main effect of condition, $F(1, 413) = 0.12$, $p = 0.732$. Participants in the SRI condition ($M = 3.39$, $SE = 0.07$) did not differ in awareness of white privilege from participants in the SRI+RC condition ($M = 3.36$, $SE = 0.06$).

CHAPTER 9

STUDY 2 DISCUSSION

The purpose of Study 2 was to examine how different communication strategies impact White people's support for policies that ban DEI initiatives. The hypothesis that White people who read an article that describes systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) would have higher support for policies that ban DEI initiatives compared to people who read an article that only describes systemic racial inequalities (SRI) was not supported. However, the hypothesis that White people with higher political conservatism will be associated with more support for policies that ban DEI initiatives was supported. Previous work has found similar findings where people who are conservatives were more likely to oppose anti-racist political policies (Allen, 2022). The opposition towards DEI initiatives in colleges and universities seems to be driven by people who identify as Republican or conservative (The Assault on DEI., n.d.).

Additionally, I had also hypothesized that there will be an interaction between political orientation and condition, such that the difference in support for banning DEI initiatives between conservatives and liberals will be larger for people who read an article that describes systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) condition compared to people who read an article that describes systemic racial inequalities (SRI) condition. Although the hypothesis was not supported interestingly, there was a moderate effect of condition, where participants who read an article with information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) had more support for laws banning DEI initiatives

compared to participants who read an article that only contained information about systemic racial inequalities (SRI). Previous work suggests that information about systemic racial inequality increases support for anti-racist political policies (Martin & Johnson, 2023). Findings from study 2 suggest that the inclusion of racially colorblind messages may reduce the impact or influence for information about systemic racial inequalities.

This is important to consider due to the prevalence of racially colorblind messages in political messaging. Many conservative news outlets also utilize racially colorblind messages (Brooks et al., 2017) therefore racially colorblind messages may be strategically used by politically conservative to reduce support for anti-racist political policies. Previous work has found that White people in the United States who are more conservative are more likely to support racial colorblindness (De keersmaecker et al., 2024). Europeans who have higher endorsement of racially colorblind messages are associated with a lower support for political policies that reduce racial disparities (Yogeeswaran et al., 2018).

In Study 2, I also examined how different communication strategies impact White people's awareness of White privilege. The hypothesis that White people who read an article that describes systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI + RC) would have lower awareness of White privilege compared to people who read an article that only describes systemic racial inequalities (SRI) was not supported. However, consistent with previous work, the hypothesis that higher political conservatism will be associated with lower awareness of White privilege was supported. Brad and colleagues (2019) found that when White people were asked to engage in an exercise that required them to consider their White privilege, White people with higher political conservatism were less likely to support an anti-racist policy change for a company.

Finally, there was no support for the hypothesis that there would be an interaction between political orientation and condition, such that the difference in awareness of White privilege between people who are more conservatives and more liberal would be larger for people who read an article that described systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) compared to people who read an article that described systemic racial inequalities (SRI). The findings are contradictory to previous work, which suggest that learning about systemic racial inequalities increases White people's awareness of White privilege (Robey & Dickter, 2022). Perhaps one reason for this could be because the information about systemic racial inequalities presented to participants was brief and did not directly discuss White privilege.

CHAPTER 10

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In Study 1, White people were asked to read articles about two different political policies; the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and policies banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities. The articles utilized a communication strategy that involves including information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC). Findings from Study 1 suggested that people varied in how they reacted to the this type of message. It seemed as though people focused on different parts of the message. For example, some people agreed with the racially colorblind statements while other people had a negative reactance towards the racially colorblind messages and disagreed. People had a similar response to the parts of the message with information about systemic racial inequalities where some people agreed with the information, disagreed with the information, or chose to not mention or ignore the information. This difference could be due to people's prior attitudes and beliefs and was examined further.

In Study 2, I found that when White people were asked to read an article that includes information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI + RC) or an article that only includes information about systemic racial inequalities (SRI) there was no difference in support for banning DEI initiatives and awareness of White privilege. However, higher political conservatism was associated with higher support for banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities and was associated with lower awareness of White privilege. Conservative media outlets often utilize racially colorblind messages (Brooks et al.,

2017). However, future work should examine this phenomenon further and how these communication frameworks impact people's attitudes towards other anti-racist political policies.

Importantly, one communication framework examined in the current research included information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC). This is a two-sided refutational message, and although people's previous attitudes towards the topic can also impact people's perceptions of two-sided and one-sided messages (Metzger et al., 2020) it is important to understand if participants were interpreting the article they read as a two-sided message. Previous work has found that two-sided refutational messages are perceived to be more persuasive and trustworthy than one-sided messages (O'keefe 1999; Hendricks et al., 2023). One consideration that should be made is that participants may not have perceived the article they read as being a two-sided refutational message. In Study 1, there were some participants who did not recognize that the articles they read were two-sided until the last paragraph of the article, where the article explicitly stated support for banning political policies. In Study 2, the article did not explicitly state support or opposition for banning political policies, therefore it is possible that some participants in Study 2 did not perceive the article with information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) as being two-sided. If participants did not recognize the article as being a two-sided refutational message, then it is possible that they did not take time to consider the two opposing viewpoints to help inform their own attitudes about the topic. Additionally, if participants did not perceive the article as being a two-sided refutational message it is possible that they believed that the article was supporting or opposing banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities. However, it is unclear how people perceived the SRI+RC article in Study 2. Future studies that

evaluate two-sided messages should consider including measures to examine whether or not participants perceived the message as being two-sided.

One limitation of this work is that the articles that included racially colorblind messages utilized both prescriptive and descriptive racially colorblind messages. Previous work has found that people are less likely to support descriptive racially colorblind messages (Patel 2022). In Study 1 participants had more of a negative reactance towards racially colorblind statements in response to the article that contained more descriptive racially colorblind messages. It could be the case that the type of racially colorblind messages used could lead to a difference in reactance. Perhaps if the current work only utilized prescriptive racially colorblind messages participants would have less negative reactance towards the racially colorblind messages. If there was less reactance in response to racially colorblind messages in the article with systemic information paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC) this could have led to higher support for banning DEI initiatives and lower awareness of White privilege. Future work considering examining the impact of racially colorblind messages should consider only testing one type of racially colorblind message.

Another limitation of this work is that in both study 1 and study 2 people were asked to read articles. The articles that people were asked to read were short and did not contain extensive information about systemic racial inequalities. Previous work has found that learning about historical and current systemic racial inequalities increases awareness of racial inequalities and support for anti-racist political policies. Perhaps, a more interactive method (e.g., workshop, video, discussion) for teaching people about systemic racial inequalities would have been more engaging and had more of an impact on people's attitudes. Another limitation of this work is that the sample is not generalizable to the U.S. population. Although I choose to focus on White

people's attitudes it is important to understand how people from other racial and ethnic groups respond to communication strategies that contain information about systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC). Indeed, findings from the current work suggest that political ideology could play a key role in people's attitudes towards political policy. Alongside this, previous work has found that racial and ethnic minority groups can also hold racially colorblind attitudes (Gonlin & Campbell, 2017). Future work should consider examining how racial and ethnic minorities respond to communication strategies involving systemic racial inequalities paired with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC).

It is important to gain an understanding about how communication messages impact people's attitudes because laws banning DEI initiatives at colleges and universities could have significant negative implications for minoritized students. Although the current research focused on racial minorities, many other marginalized groups (e.g., first-generation college students, LGBTQIA+) would be impacted by laws banning DEI initiatives. Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ have reported experiencing discrimination on college campuses (Campus Pride, n.d.). Implementing various diversity initiatives (e.g., mentorship, outreach programs, workshops, and DEI staff) contributed to an increase in enrollment and graduation rates for racial minority students (McCants, 2011) and reduced biases towards LGBTQIA+ students (Morris, 2019).

TABLE 1

Table 1.*Types of Racial Colorblindness (Patel 2022)*

Type of Racial Colorblindness	Definition	Example
Directly denying the existence of racism and systemic racial inequalities		
Naturalization (Bonilla-Siliva, 2002)	Ignoring how race plays a role in determining outcomes and framing racial inequalities as being normal	“Yeah, everyone I’ve gone out with has been White, but that’s just because most of the people that lived around me were White. I didn’t do it on purpose, it just happened like that” (Cox 2021, p. 5)
Cultural Racism (Bonilla-Siliva, 2002)	Racial inequalities are a consequence of individuals’ actions, not larger systemic racial inequalities that grant advantages to White people.	“...don’t think, you know, they’re all like that, but, I mean, it’s just that if it wasn’t that way, why would there be so many blacks living in the projects? . . . If they worked hard, they could make it just as high as anyone else could. You know, I just think that’s just, you know, they’re raised that way and they see that their parents are so they assume that’s the way it should be.” (Bonilla-Silvia et. al., 2011, p. 193)
Minimization of Racism (Bonilla-Siliva, 2002)	Acknowledging historical racism but denying the existence of contemporary racism.	“I think if you are looking for discrimination, I think it’s there to be found. But if you make the best of any situation, and if you don’t use it as an excuse. I think sometimes it’s an excuse because people felt they deserved a job, whatever!” (Bonilla-Silvia et. al., 2011, p. 194)
Disconnected power-analysis (Jayakumar & Admian, 2017)	An individual displaying an understanding of racism and systemic racial inequalities but failing to	“Because that’s what we studied—media—so I’m constantly counting the ratio of whites to non-blacks [meaning non-whites] in a commercial and the lines that they get. . . . Before, I didn’t

	understand how racism and systemic racial inequalities play a role in impacting their own experiences	have anything to compare it to, so I thought everything was just normal, whereas black people do not see it the same way, and they are often—I don’t know—oppressed in the media especially. . . . Now I think about it, because after I went to school here, I think it is privilege. . . . I don’t think skin color matters much anymore. It’s getting better” (Jayakumar & Admian, 2017, p. 926-927)
Power-evasive racial colorblindness (Neville et al., 2013)	Denying the existence of racism and structural racial inequalities	“Everyone has an equal chance to succeed in society” (Neville et al., 2013, p. 457)
Descriptive Racial Colorblindness (Patel 2022)	Directly denying race and that race and ethnicity do not impact lived experiences or how people are currently treated within the United States.	“we do not talk about race because it is not important”
Promoting egalitarian ideals and focusing attention away from racial inequalities		
Abstract Liberalism (Bonilla-Siliva, 2002)	Promoting racial equality theoretically but failing to recognize racial biases or take action toward achieving racial equality.	When asked about affirmative action: “I don’t think [MU] has a lot of racism in the admissions process. . . . So why not just pick people that are going to do well at [MU], pick people by their merit? I think we should stop the whole idea of choosing people based on their color” (Bonilla-Silvia et. al., 2011, p. 193)
Color-evasive racial colorblindness (Neville et al., 2013)	Ignoring racial differences and focusing on how everyone is the same	“don’t see the color of the person” (Neville et al., 2013, p. 457)
Prescriptive Racial Colorblindness (Patel 2022)	Race or ethnicity should not impact lived experiences or treatment within the United States.	“people should not keep bringing up, race everyone should be equal”

TABLE 2

Table 2.*Data Analysis Plan*

Phase	Description of Data Analysis Plan
Familiarize yourself with the data	I read all the responses to the open-ended questions.
Generating Initial Codes	I made note of any interesting patterns that I see emerging from the data to generate initial codes.
Searching for Themes	I identified how these codes could be combined to form themes.
Reviewing Themes	I re-examined the data given the themes identified and critically consider if any themes need to be revised or if any new themes emerge. I created a thematic map to visually showcase this process.
Defining and Naming Themes	Refine the definition of each theme making sure that each theme is concise and has a clear definition.
Producing the Report	I created a report outlining all the themes that emerged. I will also include relevant examples from the data about each theme.

Note. This data analysis plan was created based on Braun & Clark (2006) guidelines for thematic data analysis.

TABLE 3

Table 3.
Study 1 Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Mean (SD)	N	% of Sample
Age	20.10 (1.03)	32	-
Political Ideology	3.56 (1.44)	31	-
Annual Household Income	12.94 (5.62)	31	-
Gender			
Man	-	15	48.39%
Woman	-	15	48.39%
Transmasculine	-	1	3.23%
Race			
White	-	32	100%
Education			
High school diploma	-	8	25%
Some college	-	23	71.88%
Bachelor's degree	-	1	3.13%
Born in the U.S.			
Not Born in the U.S.	-	2	6.25%
Born in the U.S.	-	30	93.75%
Employment			
Not Employed	-	14	43.75%
Employed	-	18	56.25%

Note. Income levels correspond with 1 = \$0 - \$9,999, 5 = \$40,000 – \$49,000, 10 = \$90,000 - \$99,999, 12 = \$120,000 - \$129,999; 15 = \$140,000 - \$149,999, and 20 = \$190,000 or more.

TABLE 4

Table 4.
Support and Opposition Towards Systemic Racial Inequalities and Racially Colorblind Messages

	Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)	DEI Initiatives in Colleges and Universities	Total
Agree with SRI & Disagree with RC	7	4	11
Disagree with SRI & Agree with RC	2	0	2

Note. This table shows the number of participants who agreed with information about systemic racial inequalities (SRI) and disagreed with the racially colorblind messages (RC). In addition to the number of participants who disagreed with information about systemic racial inequalities (SRI) and agreed with racially colorblind messages (RC).

TABLE 5

Table 5.
Level of Support for Laws

	Ban the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)		Ban DEI Initiatives in Colleges and Universities	
Level of Support	N	% of Sample	N	% of Sample
Support	2	6.25%	3	9.38%
No Support	23	71.88%	25	78.12%
Indecisive	7	21.87%	4	12.50%

FIGURE 1

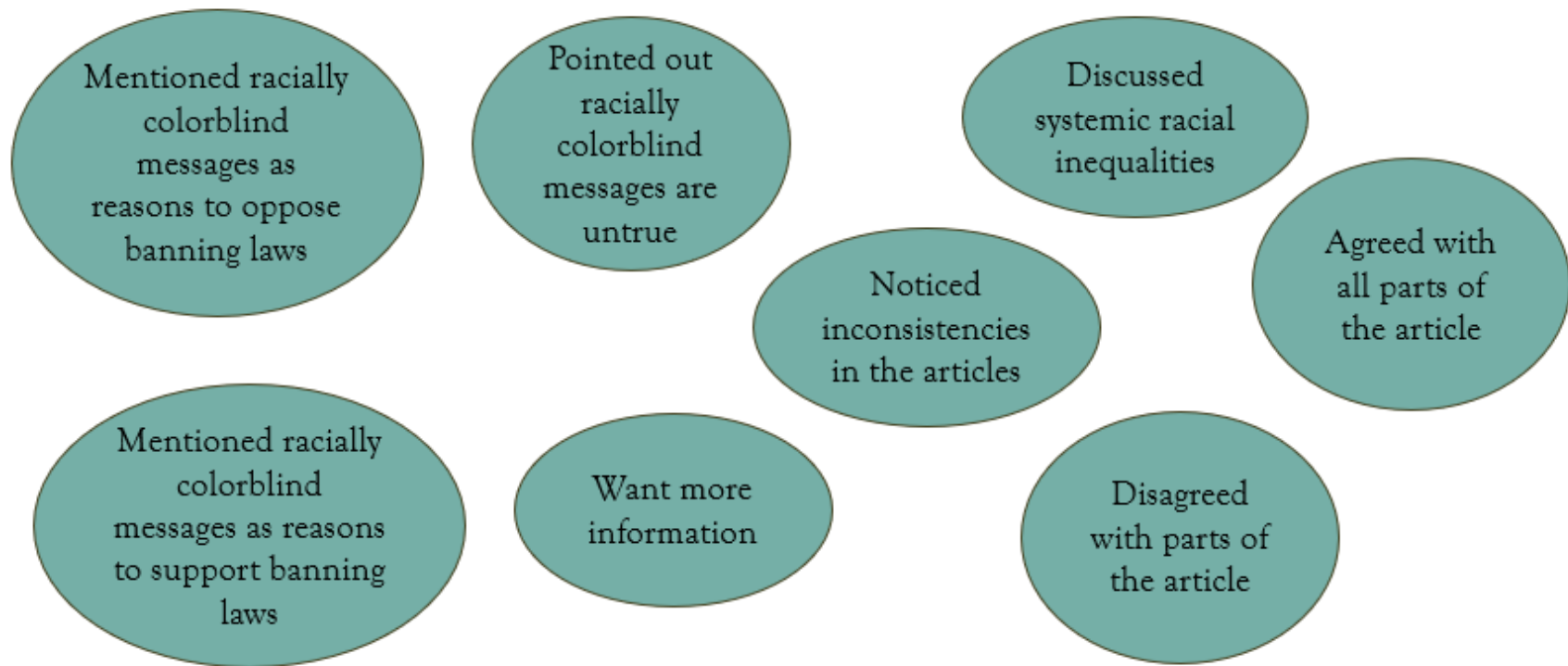
Generating Initial Codes

FIGURE 2

Searching for Themes

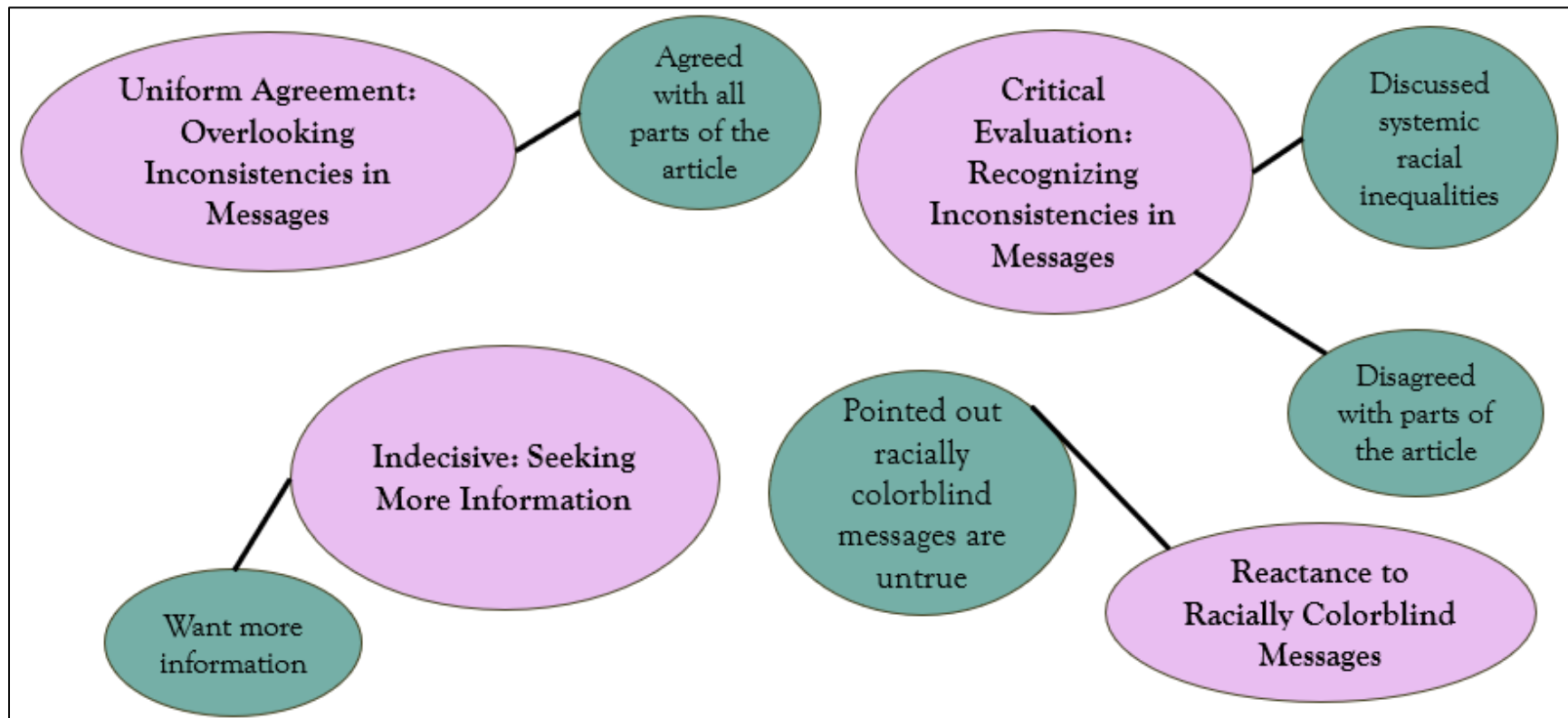


FIGURE 3

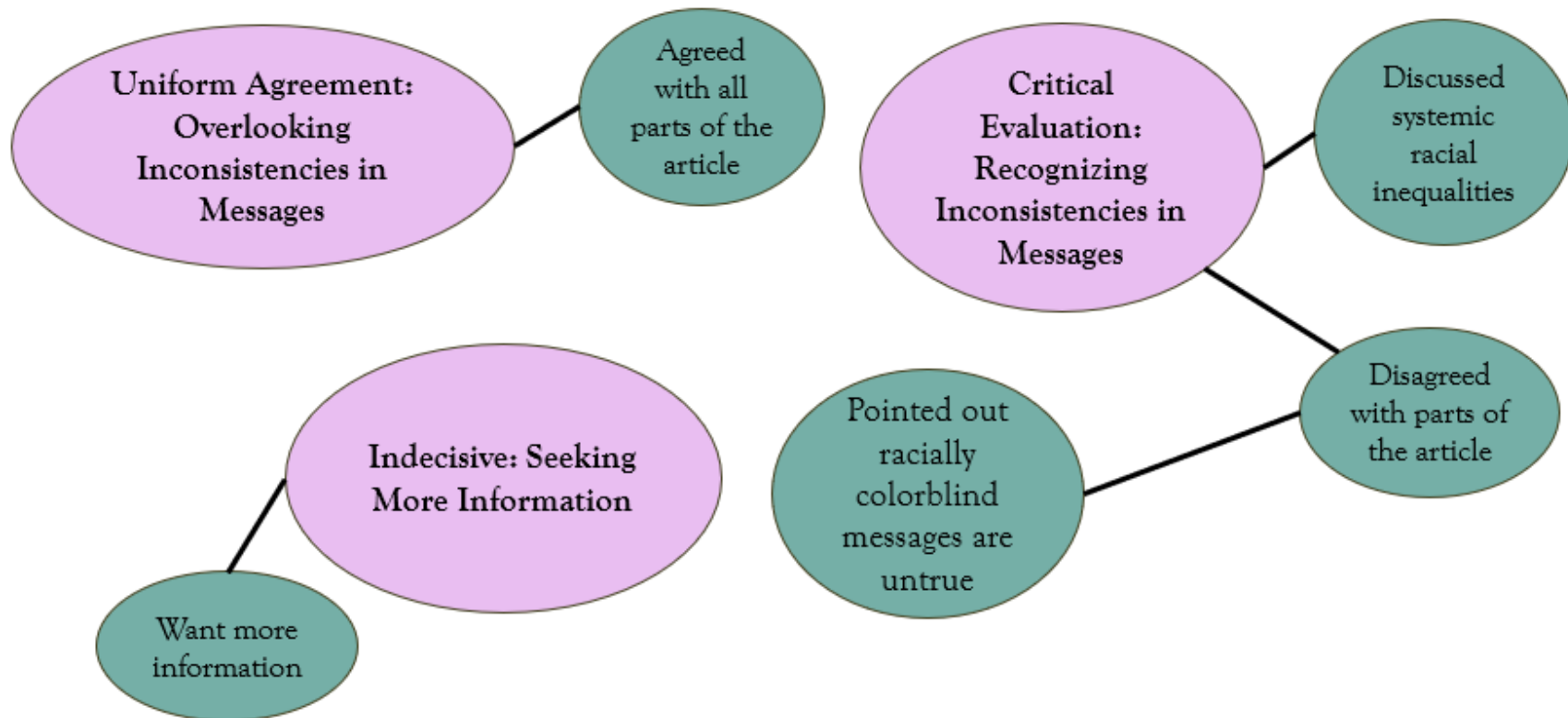
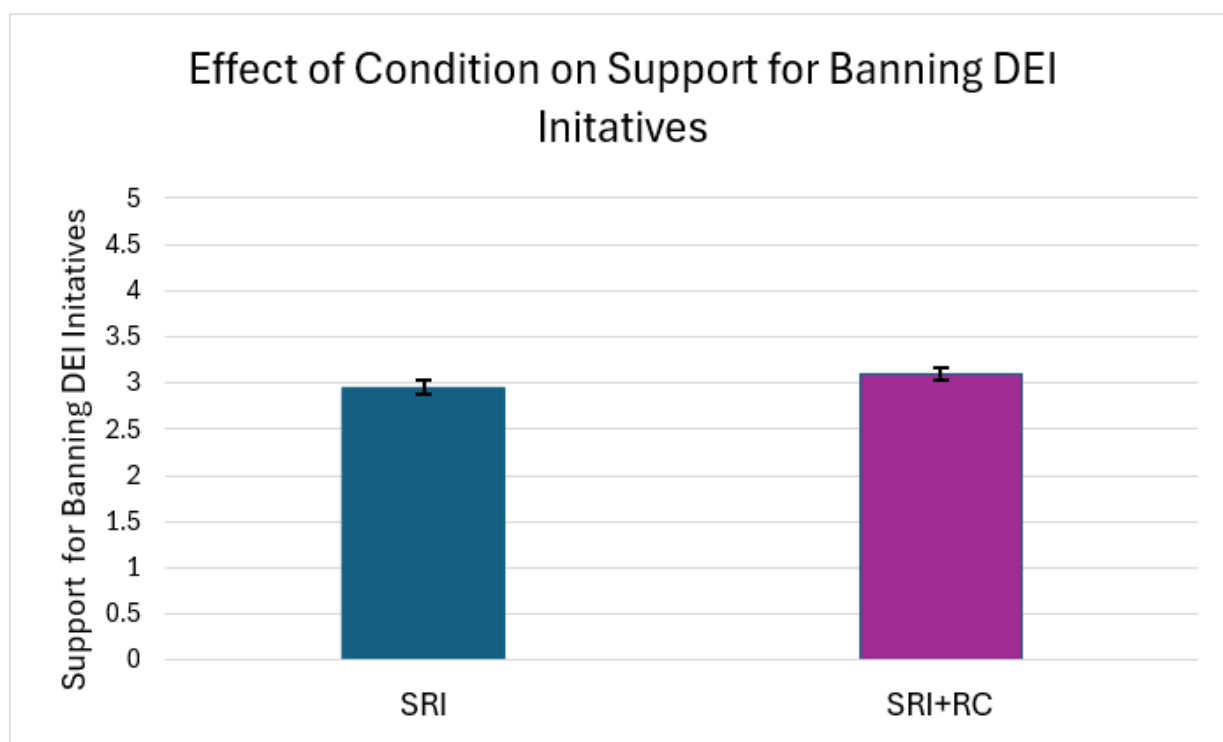
Reviewing Themes

FIGURE 4

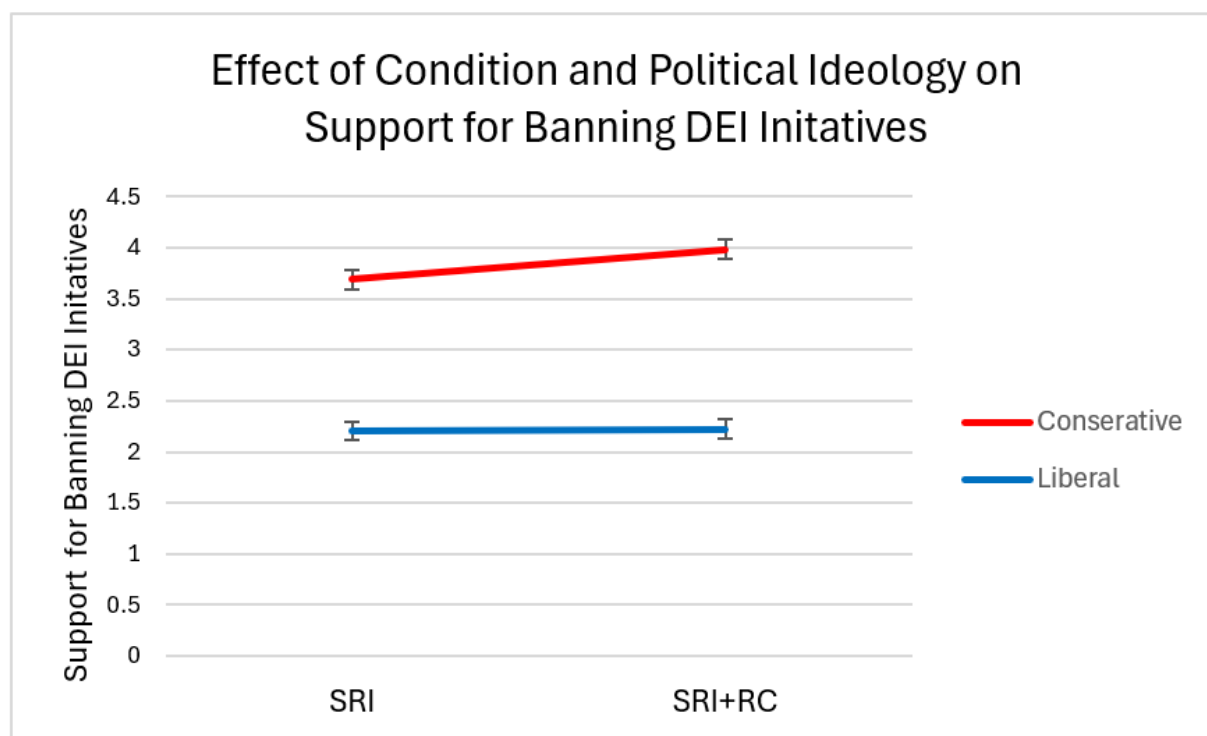
Effect of Condition on Support for Banning DEI initiatives



Note. This graph displays means for support for banning DEI initiatives based on condition.

FIGURE 5

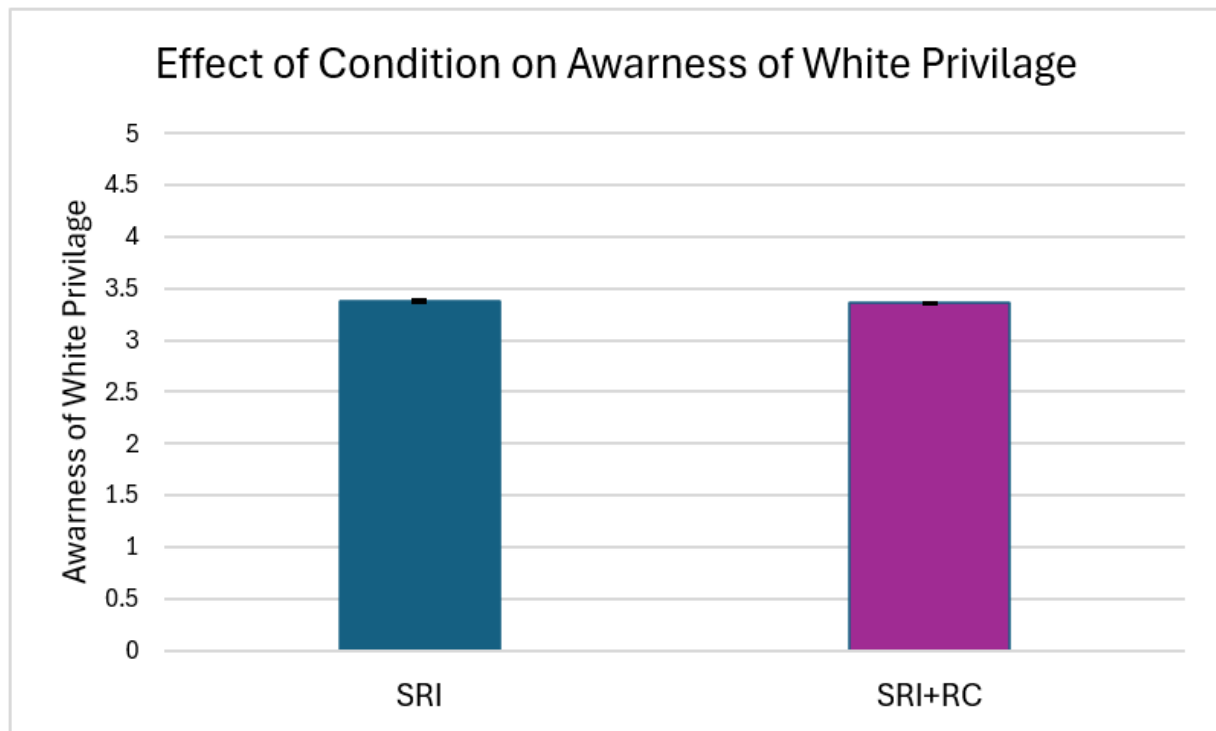
Effect of Condition and Political Ideology on Support for Banning DEI Initiatives



Note. This graph displays means for support for banning DEI initiatives based on political ideology and condition.

FIGURE 6

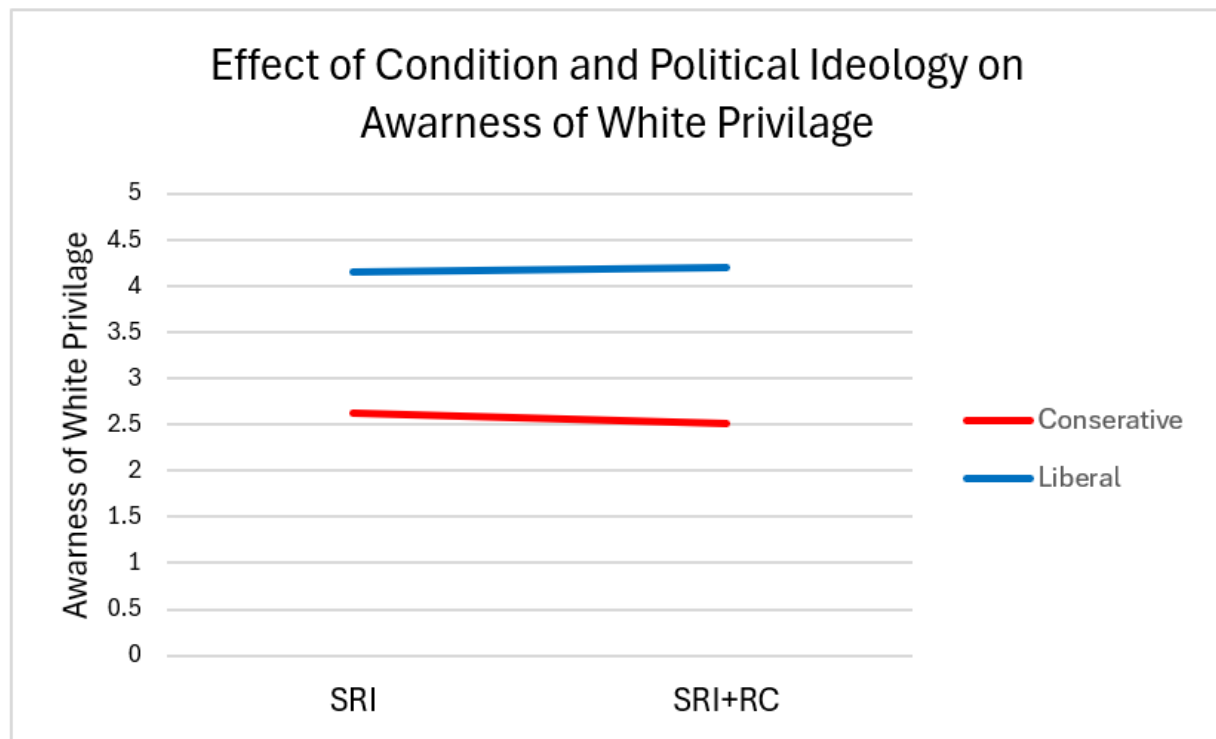
Effect of Condition on Awareness of White Privilege.



Note. This graph displays means for awareness of white privilege based on condition.

FIGURE 7

Effect of Condition and Political Ideology on Awareness of White Privilege



Note. This graph displays means for awareness of White privilege based on political ideology and condition.

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APPENDIX A

DEI Laws: Systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC)

Recently, there has been debate about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in colleges and universities. New policies aim to ban DEI initiatives in colleges and universities. Historically, educational policies have systematically limited people of color from accessing high-quality education. Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) upheld racial segregation in public schools, perpetuating increasing disparities in access to resources and facilities between White and Black schools. Racial inequities continued and Black students received poorer education due to inadequate funding and facilities.

Some people say racial inequalities still exist today, for example, the SAT is a standardized test that most high school students have to take to get into college. A higher SAT score helps you get into better colleges and get scholarships to go to college. Recent studies show that the verbal part of the SAT favors certain cultural backgrounds over others. The test may include examples, vocabulary, or reading passages that are more familiar to students from specific cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby disadvantaging those from different contexts, often students of color. This bias makes the test less reliable in measuring academic aptitude and contributes to unfair practices in college admissions. **However, all of these inequalities are more accurately defined as wealth inequalities. Granted, in the past, people of color were not allowed the same opportunities as White people however, this is not the case now. No one should be treated unequally because of their race. Everyone should be treated equally.**

Diverse students are on college campuses now, but that doesn't mean racism is absent on said campuses. The racism students may experience nowadays can be as subtle as a professor giving preferential treatment to one student over another, to racist chants in frats and sororities. **However, these events are few and far between, overall racism does not happen on college campuses.** DEI programs are not needed because everyone is being treated fairly within colleges and universities. While the number of diverse students in graduate schools has increased in recent years, White students are still the majority. **This is not due to racial inequalities because everyone has an equal chance to succeed and success is based on merit.**

***Racially Colorblind Messages are bolded**

APPENDIX B

ICWA: Systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC)

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law enacted by the United States Congress in 1978. The law was passed by Congress in 1978 in response to the high rate of removal of Native children from their families and Native tribal communities. Research from the late 1960s found that federal programs and policies resulted in many Native children being removed from their families and placed in adoptive homes, foster homes, or institutions that were outside of their cultural and Native tribal communities. ICWA establishes a preference for placement of children with family or their culture and Native tribal communities.

Right now, Native children are removed from their homes at 2 to 3 times the rate of White children and often are not placed with relatives or other Native tribal communities, even when placements are available and appropriate. Despite ICWA requirements, one national study found that only 17% of Native children not living with a biological parent reside with a Native caregiver. **When it comes to the welfare of children, critical considerations must be made to ensure that children are being cared for properly. Native children should not be treated differently due to their race or ethnicity, all children should be treated equally. Children should not be subject to laws prioritizing group identity over their individual needs and best interests.**

ICWA was created in response to the widespread removal of Native American children from their families and tribes by state child welfare agencies and private adoption agencies. **However, ICWA is not needed because we should have equal opportunities for all children to be placed in loving and supportive homes, regardless of racial or ethnic background. Banning ICWA is a step toward ensuring that children are treated as individuals with equal rights, rather than being categorized based on their race or ethnicity.**

***Racially Colorblind Messages are bolded**

APPENDIX C

Familiarity with the Indian Child Welfare Act

On a scale from 1 (Not at all familiar) to 5 (Extremely familiar)

How familiar are you with this topic, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)?

APPENDIX D

DEI Laws: Systemic racial inequalities with racially colorblind messages (SRI+RC)

On a scale from 1 (Not at all familiar) to 5 (Extremely familiar)

How familiar are you with this topic, laws banning DEI in Colleges and Universities?

APPENDIX E

Open Ended Questions

For each of these questions below, please provide as much detail as possible in your response.

Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)

1. Do you think that this article is written well?
2. Can you give a 3-4 sentence summary of the article that you read?
3. What key pieces of information stand out to you in this article?
4. Is there anything in this article that you disagree with? If so why?
5. Is this anything in this article that you agree with? If so why?
6. Having read the article, what is your opinion about the topic? Should the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) be banned?
7. What arguments/points in the article influenced your opinion about the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)?
8. What (if any) changes would you make to this article?

DEI policies in Colleges and Universities

1. Do you think that this article is written well?
2. Can you give a 3-4 sentence summary of the article that you read?
3. What key pieces of information stand out to you in this article?
4. Is there anything in this article that you disagree with? If so why?
5. Is this anything in this article that you agree with? If so why?
6. Having read the article, what is your opinion about the topic DEI policies in Colleges and Universities be banned?
7. What arguments/points in the article influenced your opinion about DEI policies in Colleges and Universities?
8. What (if any) changes would you make to this article?

General

1. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. If there is anything else you would like to share about your experience reading these articles, please feel free to share your thoughts.

APPENDIX F

Instructions Given to AI

AI was asked to write an essay by being told the following:

Here is some information, please write an essay about this topic.

Recently, there has been debate about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in colleges and universities. New policies aim to ban the following DEI initiatives in colleges and universities:

- DEI Offices and Staff: Specialized departments and personnel within organizations dedicated to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Mandatory DEI Training: Required programs or workshops focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics to foster awareness and inclusivity.
- Diversity Statements: Formal declarations expressing an organization's commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Identity-Based Preferences: Policies considering applicants based, in part, on their racial, ethnic, gender, or other identity-related backgrounds to promote diversity.

APPENDIX G

Systemic Racial Inequalities (SRI)

Recently, there has been debate about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in colleges and universities. New policies aim to ban DEI initiatives in colleges and universities. Historically, educational policies have systematically limited people of color from accessing high-quality education. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) upheld racial segregation in public schools, perpetuating increasing disparities in access to resources and facilities between White and Black schools. Racial inequities continued and Black students received poorer education due to inadequate funding and facilities.

Some people say racial inequalities still exist today, for example, the SAT is a standardized test that most high school students have to take to get into college. A higher SAT score helps you get into better colleges and get scholarships to go to college. Recent studies show that the verbal part of the SAT favors certain cultural backgrounds over others. The test may include examples, vocabulary, or reading passages that are more familiar to students from specific cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby disadvantaging those from different contexts, often students of color. This bias makes the test less reliable in measuring academic aptitude and contributes to unfair practices in college admissions.

Diverse students are on college campuses now, but that doesn't mean racism is absent on said campuses. The racism students may experience nowadays can be as subtle as a professor giving preferential treatment to one student over another, to racist chants in frats and sororities. While the number of diverse students in graduate schools has increased in recent years, White students are still the majority. People and leaders in higher education are working to figure out how to navigate the implications of these laws banning DEI in colleges.

APPENDIX H

Systemic Racial Inequalities with Racially Colorblind Messages (SRI + RC)

Recently, there has been debate about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in colleges and universities. New policies aim to ban DEI initiatives in colleges and universities. Historically, educational policies have systematically limited people of color from accessing high-quality education. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) upheld racial segregation in public schools, perpetuating increasing disparities in access to resources and facilities between White and Black schools. Racial inequities continued and Black students received poorer education due to inadequate funding and facilities.

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Diverse students are on college campuses now, but that doesn't mean racism is absent on said campuses. The racism students may experience nowadays can be as subtle as a professor giving preferential treatment to one student over another, to racist chants in frats and sororities. **However, these events are few and far between, overall racism does not happen on college campuses.** While the number of diverse students in graduate schools has increased in recent years, White students are still the majority. This difference is not due to racial inequalities because everyone has an equal chance to succeed and success is based on merit. **In trying to make this equal we should make sure that no one is unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged based on their background.** People and leaders in higher education are working to figure out how to navigate the implications of these laws banning DEI in colleges.

***Racially Colorblind Messages are bolded**

APPENDIX I

Agreement with Article

“Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements” on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

1. I agree with everything in the article.
2. The article had good points.
3. I would say similar things about this topic.

APPENDIX J

Awareness of White Privilege

Modified from Swim & Miller (1999)

“Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements” on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

1. White people have certain advantages that people of color do not have in this society.
2. My status as a White person grants me unearned privileges in today’s society.
3. I feel that White skin in the United States opens many doors for Whites during their everyday lives.
4. I do not feel that White people have any benefits or privileges due to their race. (**reverse scored**)
5. My skin color is an asset to me in my everyday life.

APPENDIX K

Support for Policies Banning DEI Initiatives.

“Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements” on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

1. I support laws banning DEI initiatives in colleges and universities.
2. Colleges and universities should not use their resources for DEI offices and staff.
3. Admissions in colleges and universities should not take race/ethnicity or other identities into consideration.
4. Diversity statements, where people are asked to describe how they will support the organization’s DEI goals, should not be required in colleges and universities
5. Mandatory DEI training should not be implemented at colleges or universities.

APPENDIX L

Political Ideology

To assess participant's political ideology, participants will be asked to respond to two items from 1 (strongly liberal) to 7 (strongly conservative).

1. Please indicate your political ideology on social issues (e.g., abortion, gay rights). I am _____ on social issues.
2. Please indicate your political ideology on economic issues (e.g., taxes, government spending). I am _____ on economic issues.

APPENDIX M

Demographic Questionnaire

- 1. What is your age (open-ended)**
- 2. What is your gender?**
 - a. Woman
 - b. Man
 - c. Transgender
 - d. Non Binary
 - e. Another gender identity, please specify (open-ended)
- 3. What is your racial/ethnic identity?**
 - a. Indigenous American
 - b. East Asian
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. White
 - e. Latino/a/x or Hispanic
 - f. South Asian/Southeast Asian
 - g. Middle Eastern/North African
 - h. Another ethnic identity, please specify (open-ended)
- 4. What is your annual household income?**
 - a. \$0-\$9,999
 - b. \$10,000-\$19,999
 - c. \$20,000-\$29,999
 - d. \$20,000-\$29,999
 - e. \$40,000-\$49,999
 - f. \$50,000-\$59,999
 - g. \$60,000-\$69,999
 - h. \$70,000-\$79,999
 - i. \$80,000-\$89,999
 - j. \$90,000-\$99,999
 - k. \$100,000-\$109,999
 - l. \$110,000-\$119,999
 - m. \$120,000-\$129,999
 - n. \$130,000-\$139,999
 - o. \$140,000-\$149,999
 - p. \$150,000-\$159,999
 - q. \$160,000-\$169,999
 - r. \$170,000-\$179,999
 - s. \$180,000-\$189,999
 - t. \$190,000 or more
- 5. What is your current education level?**

- a. Some high school
 - b. High school diploma
 - c. Some college
 - d. Associate degree
 - e. Bachelor's degree
 - f. Master's Degree
 - g. Ph.D., M.D., J.D.
- 6. Were you born in the United States?**
- a. Yes
 - b. No
- 7. Are you currently employed?**
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other (open-ended)